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The Hitler Myth

"If you see yourself in concocted poses, you don't have to worry about feelings," one of my patients, a successful dentist, once said to me. "If you project yourself through images, everything is revocable. You can put the images in drawers and use them when needed. If everything is visually projected, you will *seem* to be in charge of everything, including yourself."

My patient said this immediately after telling me about her experiences as a child with an unpredictable mother. Although the mother, also a dentist, seemed structured and predictable in general, she tended toward periods of sudden coldness toward her daughter. My patient recalled imagining how, as a doctor, "I could pretend to be cool and in control of everything. Simply perfect and admirable. In this pose my competence made me untouchable. I couldn't be abandoned. I could direct everything myself. The terror caused by my mother's rejection couldn't take me by surprise. This way I had control of myself. You mustn't have any empathy because then you feel weak and make others feel anxious."

This patient is describing a process that explains Adolf Hitler's posing as well: the creation of a self that projects an image of absolute strength of will and decisiveness while concealing a confused, amorphous, undifferentiated, and limitless ego-structure filled with anxiety, hatred, and self-pity. This was exactly what Dr. Albert Krebs experienced with Hitler in his encounter with him in Hamburg.

Krebs, Gauleiter for Hamburg until Hitler personally expelled him from the Nazi Party in May of 1932, reinforces this view of the Führer in his recollections of the early days of the Party. He writes that, for Hitler, only tactics and demagogy counted, that he left no room for the thinking and initiative of his followers but wanted to be in command of the entire

movement himself. Krebs experienced "the real Hitler" one morning in Hamburg's Hotel Atlantik when he brought Hitler printed copies of a speech the Führer had given the previous evening. Krebs found him sipping vegetable soup in a state of collapse and hypochondria; complaining of outbreaks of perspiration and trembling, he was suffering from a morbid combination of extreme anxiety and consciousness of his mission (Krebs, p. 8). Krebs continues: "I had always seen him only as a political leader, never as a human being. The weakness he was revealing in this unguarded moment bore within itself the seeds of an out-of-control force . . . [indicating] that Hitler's strength was merely 'overcompensation' for weakness in search of stability through unbridled violence" (p. 136f.).

What Krebs is describing here is a self for display purposes, which when it breaks down exposes this kind of person's inner chaos. In that moment of inner nakedness Hitler told Krebs in detail about his stomach cramps, which he thought were a precursor of cancer and which made him believe he had only a few years left to live. Hitler then shouted: "'I have no time to lose. . . . I must come to power as soon as possible in order to complete my gigantic tasks in the time remaining to me. I've got to! I've got to!'" With these words, Krebs writes, Hitler pulled himself together, which was immediately apparent in a change of posture, facial expression, and tone of voice. His depression was overcome. Hitler the human being had changed back into "the Führer" (p. 137). This was in 1929 . Reciting the words of his role—as in a play—brought him back to his image-based self. And in an instant he was transformed.

Krebs cites a speech Hitler gave in the Brown House at the end of June 1930 in which he said: "'And here and now I proclaim political infallibility for myself and my successors in the leadership of the Nazi Party. I hope the world will accustom itself to this without opposition and as quickly as it has to the claim to infallibility of the Holy Father'" (p. 139). No one in the audience seemed to be amazed at this grandiosity. Apparently they all appropriated it for themselves because they too sustained themselves with similar fantasies.

Most of Hitler's contemporaries were clearly impressed by his intense strength of will, his forcefulness, and his drive to assert himself. They saw in him a pillar of strength, a leader who takes drastic measures, a man of solidity, self-confidence, and good conscience. It's true, he did give the appearance of believing in himself, of self-assurance. But what was the reality? Sebastian Haffner saw Hitler in a completely different light—as a moral cripple, unaware of the true values of life, unable to work or better himself, incapable of inspiring or bestowing love, both evil and loathsome

(p. 19). The use of words to spur himself and intimidate others provided a leitmotif for him. "'The task I confront to-day" was a phrase recurring at least twenty or thirty times in his speeches . . . The only stable element in Hitler's politics . . . is their devotion to his own person. . . . Hitler is no statesman, but a swindler in a statesman's mask" (pp. 22-23).

Striking a pose was characteristic for Hitler even in childhood. The pride he took in being impervious to pain when his father beat him with a whip is an early example. He had to find himself in this pose because he had no support from a real emotional life, one based on being in touch with one's experience of pain, helplessness, grief, and despair. Playing a role took the place for him of an inner life, for which he didn't have the strength. Someone who lacks this inner strength must live a life that is oriented toward appearance—in other words, the assumption of poses. Thus, Hitler began quite early, when he discovered his power of oratory in Munich, to create an image in accordance with his childhood pose of being strong, which had given him relief from his pain. This image required him to project an impression of decisiveness and uncompromising authority: "I have . . . attained these successes only. . . because I never allowed weaklings to talk me out of or divert me from a decision I had once reached and . . . because I was always determined, no matter what the circumstances, to obey a necessity once I recognized it" (Hitler speech of Sept. 14, 1936, cited by Domarus, I, 24 and 646).

If this pose is no longer compatible with reality, however, a breakdown occurs, manifested in disorders of consciousness. For example, Stalin had such a severe breakdown after Hitler's attack on Russia that for weeks he wasn't in a condition to govern. No longer able to reconcile one's rigid, fantasy-based self-image with reality, a person often can deal with an extreme situation only in a psychosomatic manner. In Hitler's case, his childhood fits of rage were not the only signs of this syndrome: his sudden blindness after a mustard-gas attack on October 15, 1918, must also be seen in this context. Of course, his visual impairment was partly attributable to the temporary effects of the gas, but the accompanying psychological reaction was so striking that Hitler was assigned to the care of the head psychiatrist, Edmund Forster, at the military hospital in Pasewalk (Forster).

Shortly after his recovery Hitler again became blind. Rudolph Binion attributes this relapse to despair over the revolutionary upheavals occurring at the time of Germany's defeat in 1918. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler himself refers to "the most terrible certainty of my life," namely, that a revolution had taken place; "Everything began to go black again before my eyes" (p. 266). An hallucination "saved" him, a vision of liberating the

German people and restoring Germany's greatness. He claimed that "'while in the infirmary in Pasewalk he received a command from another world above to save his unhappy country'" (Binion, 1973, p. 213).

Yet the reality concealed behind Hitler's pose was completely different. He was incapable of making decisions. Only when he saw no other way out could he make up his mind. That was the situation when it was a question of having Ernst Röhm murdered; he hesitated for a long time until forced to act by strong pressure from the armed forces. But immediately afterwards, he threw himself into the role of the iron-willed commander who makes ruthless decisions, proclaiming, "In that hour I was responsible for the fate of the German nation and therefore served as Supreme Judge for the German people" (speech of July 13, 1934, quoted by Domarus, I, 421).

When reality refused to conform to his fantasies (for example, after the unsuccessful *putsch* of the Austrian S.S. and Party functionaries in July 1934), he reacted with rage and hysteria (von Papen). Hitler's decision to re-occupy the Rhineland in March 1936 also revealed his lack of a sense of reality: it was a hazardous undertaking, not a reality-based decision. Hitler himself said afterwards: "Had the French then marched into the Rhineland . . . we would have had to withdraw again with our tails between our legs . . . The military force at our disposal would not have sufficed even for limited resistance . . ." (quoted by Kershaw, p. 588). "'My God, am I happy that it has gone so smoothly!'" (quoted by Frank).

It is interesting and really frightening that in spite of Hitler's actual indecisiveness it was precisely his pose of unshakable strength of will that became a myth. Apparently people see what they want to see. The fact is that he was a hesitater, incapable of governing the German nation in a resolute manner; however, his entourage turned this into a positive trait. Werner Willikens, Secretary of the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture, said in a speech on February 21, 1934:

> Everyone with opportunity to observe it knows that the Führer can only with great difficulty order from above everything that he intends to carry out sooner or later. On the contrary, until now everyone has worked best in his place in the new Germany if, so to speak, he works towards the Führer.
>
> Very often, and in many places, it has been the case that individuals, already in previous years, have waited for commands and orders. Unfortunately, that will probably also be so in future. Rather,

however, it is the duty of every single person to attempt, in the spirit of the Führer, to work towards him. Anyone making mistakes will come to [pay for] it soon enough. But the one who works correctly towards the Führer along his lines and towards his aim will in future as previously have the finest reward of one day suddenly attaining the legal confirmation of his work. (quoted by Kershaw, p. 529)

"To work toward him" meant, as Kershaw points out, making decisions without Hitler having to give an order. The result was fragmentation of the official government bureaucracy, which was replaced with rule by the Nazi Party bosses who happened to enjoy Hitler's favor and who therefore felt themselves to be even more indebted to their Führer. Thus, since Hitler avoided confrontation and was incapable of making decisions, the consequence, as Kershaw has established, was chaos in questions of governance and administration.

An extraordinary phenomenon ensued: on the one hand there existed the myth of the ruler with an iron will; on the other, a highly modern state that lacked any coordination at its center and whose head of government for the most part remained aloof from the machinery of government. Fritz Wiedemann, one of Hitler's adjutants, describes the situation:

Gradually Hitler reverted to the way of life he had so enjoyed as a young man in Linz and Vienna . . . He usually did not make an appearance until shortly before the mid-day meal, quickly read the news items the Reich Press Secretary . . . had collected for him and then went to eat. Thus, it became more and more difficult for [State Secretaries] Lammers and Meissner to get decisions from Hitler that only he as head of state could make. . . . When he was staying at Obersalzberg [his Bavarian mountain retreat] . . . he regularly didn't leave his room until around 2 p.m. Then it was time to eat. Going for a walk took up most of the afternoon, and films were shown directly after supper.

The myth of the strong-willed Führer/father figure required everyone to guess what Hitler wanted. And those who didn't correctly "work towards him" had to reckon with the fact that they would soon enough be punished for their failing. Although Kershaw clearly portrays this side of Hitler, he nevertheless still sees in him the bold and decisive statesman. This shows the degree to which our culture, conditioned by its identification with the aggressor, makes us see "greatness" and a strong will in our leaders/fathers, irrespective of whether it is actually there.

To the present day the Hitler myth would have us believe that his strength and greatness can be measured by the substantial improvement he brought about in the German economy. In fact, the opposite was true: in the fall of 1935 the Berlin police reported a worsening mood in the population because commodity prices and unemployment were rising. When the mood deteriorated even more in January 1936, Hitler was enraged and refused to listen to such reports (Kershaw, p. 726). In the same month the Labor Ministry reported the number of unemployed at two and a half million. In order to counter this news Hitler responded by staging the re-occupation of the Rhineland, thus kindling a mood of nationalistic euphoria. At that time one-half of the working population was earning no more than 18 Reich marks a week—wages below the poverty line and considerably lower than in 1928 during the time of the Weimar Republic.

Thus, it becomes clear that the Hitler myth was not simply his own creation but had something to do with people's need for this myth, which in turn confirmed Hitler's belief in the reality of his pose; he held more and more rigidly to his self-produced image as if it were his true self. By the time he addressed the elite military units of the Nazi Party on September 13, 1936, he already believed in his own infallibility: "It is the miracle of our time that you have found me, that you have found me among so many millions! And that I have found you is Germany's great good fortune!" (quoted by Doramus, I, 243). And earlier, on March 14 of the same year in Munich: "Neither threats nor warnings will deter me from my path. I am going with the certainty of a sleepwalker along the path laid out for me by Providence. . . . Let the German people now judge . . . whether the German nation has declined or arisen in these three years. . . . I await this judgment . . . It will establish my great historical legitimacy. And I will then appear before the world and be able to say: 'It is not I who is speaking; the German people have spoken'" (quoted by Domarus, I, 606).

People whose lives have been shaped by their identification with the aggressor hope for salvation from the very person who caused their suffering. They do not look for a leader with characteristics of real strength, however, but for one with a fictitious strength. This comes about as a consequence of the situation in their childhood when their parents oppressed them in order to feel strong and important themselves. It explains why these people hope for salvation from someone who promises strength yet doesn't really possess it. The *pose* of their parents has become synonymous with reality, not their actual experience of them. Here lies the root of the problem as to why people seek to follow those who represent a pose best. The pose has taken the place of reality. So in

the end such people seek the cruel king or cruel queen from their past (Gruen 1997, 1999, 2000).

A patient of mine, a 50-year-old geologist, told me that his father had fought as a volunteer in Hitler's Wehrmacht. The father not only took an extremely authoritarian approach toward his little son but also subjected him to corporal punishment for the slightest deviation from prescribed behavior. His wife, whom he treated in the same condescending and violent way, never tried to protect her son. Only once, when the child was seven years old, did she intervene because she believed the father might beat the boy to death in his rage. The son, obedient and always ready to be submissive, even as an adult was still plagued by strong guilt feelings whenever he felt negatively toward his father. He entered therapy because he couldn't get rid of the feeling that something was wrong with his world. Early on he had made the decision never to have children. He became very angry every time he heard a child crying because he interpreted the crying as an attempt to make demands on him. This made him so irate that he was afraid he might hurl a child of his own against the wall, and he certainly didn't want to let it come to that.

We see here someone who didn't want to pass on what had been done to him. Nevertheless, his identification with his father continued to affect him unconsciously, for his reaction to crying children was the same his father had to him as an infant. His rage was the rage of his father, whose hatred he had totally internalized as his own. Thus, his own reactions as well as the father's condemnation of his son's expressions of pain, now internalized, become something foreign, a stranger to be punished outside the boundaries of his own self.

IMPRINTING

Identifying with the aggressor makes it possible for victims to live with their experience of terror by reversing their emotional reaction to it—namely, by loving and idealizing the person who causes their suffering. This identification is an attempt to appropriate the oppressor's violence, which is experienced as strength by the victim. This supposed strength suppresses what could lead to the development of true strength: the connection to one's pain and its overcoming through the concern and caring of another person. If this is lacking, however, a process begins in which one's own empathic perceptions and feelings are violently split off once and for all as "foreign" and "strange." Those who develop in this way are the very ones who let themselves be "saved" from their inner malaise by a "Führer." I would now like to show how this occurs.

For the young child, identifying with the aggressor means identifying with that person's superior force. But what kind of people is it who exercise force in order to dominate and humiliate a child? What kind of people feel so threatened by the vitality, curiosity, and inventiveness of a child that they must crush these qualities? They can only be people who feel deeply insecure, inferior, and inadequate but cannot admit these feelings, which they compensate for by adopting a pose of forcefulness, decisiveness, and unyielding strength of will—a pose especially easy to assume with one's own child. The child, however, then identifies with the parents' pose, not with the reality of their actual behavior. Nevertheless, children do sense their parents' deep-seated feelings of weakness, experiencing these empathically but at the same time banning them from consciousness. These parental feelings of weakness then become part of the stranger within, who must be rejected. This process causes children to focus on and identify with a pose of authority: in later life they will not seek another person's reality but that person's pose. I would like to call attention here to separate studies on autonomy by Bluvol and Roskam, which both show that adolescents who identify with authority figures are unable to see their parents as real human beings with both positive and negative aspects, but instead form idealized images of them (that is, they identify with their parents' pose).

Higher life-forms focus on their mother as soon as they are born. This leads to a phenomenon known as imprinting. Schneirla has reported on the Australian "tracer sheep," for example, which doesn't let its mother out of its sight for a moment. If the mother dies, the young animal will still circle the corpse even after it has decayed and only a pile of bones remains. Eventually the sheep turns to a stone, boulder, or hillock to replace the mother as the visual center of its habitat.

By analogy, human beings are imprinted with the image of their mother and father, but this imprinting occurs on two levels—that of the actual parents and that of the idealized ones. The extent of the "idealization" depends on the extent of the terror that forces children to identify with the aggressor.

In 1945, immediately after the end of World War II, a group led by the psychiatrist and child analyst David M. Levy undertook a study of the attitudes of 83 Germans toward paternal authority. Seventy-three per cent of those questioned agreed with the statement, "The word of the father must be absolute law in the family;" 25 per cent disagreed; 2 per cent didn't answer. One of the respondents reported: "When we were young, we had terrific respect for our father. We feared him more than we loved him. One time he told me to jump off a wood-pile where I was playing. . . . I did.

but I sprained my foot when I fell. When my father came over to me, he slapped my face. He was strict; he loved us but he could not show it. I imagine it was his male modesty" (quoted by Schaffner, p. 21). Here we see the father idealized as a loving one, which didn't correspond to the actual situation.

Another participant in the study described the self-hatred this kind of treatment can lead to: "Externally it appears to be a happy [childhood], but internally there are many conflicts. Germans are never able to be happy; there is really no incentive to be young or gay or to enjoy life without restriction. It makes a young German always want to die. I noticed this especially during the war. It wasn't just the ever-present danger in the battle, or a desire to evade it; it was just the wish to be dead, to sacrifice one's self, no matter for what goal. All Germans are always under pressure. None of us can develop harmoniously" (quoted by Schaffner, p. 41).

Whatever form the terror takes that children are subjected to, they always identify with the image their parents project of themselves for the outside world. As a result, children become fixated on the facade and not on the true inner nature of their parents. This of course makes it easy for those who present their facade as reality to win over and dominate a following. The way we are socialized programs us perfectly for this pattern. It is also why a Führer who adopts a pose of forcefulness, decisiveness, and self-assurance has such a persuasive effect. If in addition he preaches to us about stereotypical enemies, thus legitimizing the acting out of our hatred, then his success is practically assured. It is not ideologies that are involved here but the early imprinting on children of the parental pose and the resulting denial of the reality of their parents' weakness, awareness of which would have posed a danger for these children. This explains why "Führers" and their followers react with such fury when their attention is drawn to their real weaknesses—they feel threatened in their innermost core.

John Bushnell illustrated this in his study of the Russian Army's behavior during the revolutionary years of 1905 and 1906. He describes how, depending on the situation, the army not only put down rebellions but also mutinied repeatedly. The same soldiers behaved in radically different ways in rapid succession: within ten months they went through two complete cycles of rebellion and renewed loyalty. Troops that put down rebellions from January to October 1905 mutinied from the end of October to the beginning of December, and by the end of December they were again shooting at civilians, only to rebel anew from May to June of 1906 and then at the end of July to suppress uprisings again.

Bushnell shows that the soldiers' fluctuating behavior had nothing to do with how they were treated or with their political views. All that mattered was how they perceived the regime's authority—that alone gave them a sense of having a stable self. If they believed the old regime was coming to an end, they mutinied; but if they believed it was still in control, they repressed civilians.

We can see from this that it is not so much the disintegration of an external social structure that produces rebellion, but whether there is still an authority to whom one can submit. If it no longer seems to be there, then a personality that has been based on conformity falls apart. And thus shifts of loyalty occur—in this case repeatedly. The ever-present readiness for violence in people with this sort of identity structure turns directly against what they formerly considered good. At the same time these "subservient subjects," as Heinrich Mann described them in his famous novel by that same name (*Der Untertan*), seek deliverance from their feelings of inferiority. The sense of being on the side of the victors or of belonging to a master race is admirably suited for this purpose.

History is rich in messianic figures who promise to free people from their troubles. In his classic work, *Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements*, Norman Cohn provides many portraits of leaders who led their followers into bitter battle against the supposed enemy in order to deliver them from their helplessness, misery, and despair. Not one of them, however, embodied the myth of absolute, superhuman strength of purpose as perfectly as Hitler. He cast a spell over his listeners—as in his speech in Nuremberg on September 14, 1936—by repeatedly referring to their own weaknesses. All his listeners recognized from their own experience that it was this weakness that stood in the way of firmness of will. And they all knew how easy it was to be diverted from their path by "constant prattle." Hitler was expressing something they recognized as their own inadequacy. By identifying with him and his pose they could experience the firmness of will they were incapable of attaining on their own.

In this manner a damaged ego can strengthen its sense of self-worth. In the course of this process, hatred and the inner enemy must both be appealed to in order to shift them onto external targets. In a New Yorker article (1983), Jane Kramer wrote about Schlitz, a city in the German state of Hessen that had been ruled for eight centuries by a noble family who promised to protect its citizens from enemies in return for their servitude. In an interview with Kramer the mayor of Schlitz told her of his problem with the city's inhabitants, who—even today—were still prepared to follow

anyone who gave them orders as long as those orders were directed against an enemy. For such people the world is incomprehensible and unmanageable without an enemy. Only an authority figure who finds enemies for them, even if he practices terror, gives them a feeling of security.

By providing people with enemies, Hitler made it possible for them to project the hated inner stranger onto others, to externalize their hatred without experiencing guilt feelings, and thus free themselves from the oppressive burden of inferiority. This is the liberation people yearn for; it is why they need a Führer who is not an authentic one. An authentic leader, such as Abraham Lincoln, would call for people to accept responsibility and expect them to face the truth. With a leader like him, many people would rise to the challenge. Yet there are those who cannot do so because then they would be confronted with their own submission. They cannot, for the terror lurking behind their identification with the aggressor forces them to deny the truth. The result is an often life-long search for liberation from feeling inferior instead of from the pain that was once inflicted on them as children.

William Shirer, an American correspondent in Berlin at the time of the reoccupation of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936, describes the reaction to Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on that occasion: The 600 Reichstag deputies, "little men with big bodies and bulging necks and cropped hair and pouched bellies and brown uniforms and heavy boots . . . spring, yelling and crying, to their feet . . . . The audience in the galleries does the same, all except a few diplomats and about fifty of us correspondents. Their hands are raised in slavish salute, their faces now contorted with hysteria, their mouths wide open, shouting, shouting, their eyes, burning with fanaticism, glued on the new god, the Messiah. The Messiah plays his role superbly" (quoted by Kershaw, p. 587f.).

People want to identify with a figure they experience as powerful. "I subordinate myself without further ado to Herr Adolf Hitler," wrote Ernst Graf zu Reventlow (Kershaw, p. 297). "I had found myself, my leader, and my cause;" thus Kurt Lüdecke described the impact Hitler made on him in 1922 when he heard him speak for the first time (Kershaw, p. 186). "How many look to him in touching faith as the helper, saviour, the redeemer from overgreat distress" (Kershaw, p. 313)—this the reaction of Luise Solmitz, a schoolteacher, on hearing Hitler speak in April 1932.

All three sought an identity through a process of identification because they had lost their true selves, from which they had become estranged by identifying with an earlier aggressor. This process condemns human beings to search all their lives for redeemers because their own estrangement

from the self they could have been makes them feel empty and worthless; it deludes them into making a leader out of a figure who is a nobody and who for this very reason had to invent a fictitious self made up of a facade of strength and will power. Men like Hitler are given the chance to become somebody only because the psychic injury done to children is so widespread in our culture. Without its prevalence, a phenomenon like Hitler—or Milosevic— would not be possible. Thus, people with an autonomous self, such as authors Sebastian Haffner and Kurt Tucholsky, saw Hitler for what he really was—a nobody. In order to accurately comprehend someone like Hitler, we have to differentiate among the various ways of developing an identity, between those that lead to building a solid inner core of the personality and those that lead merely to its ersatz. In the latter case we are dealing with a combination of assuming a pose and identifying with authority figures that enables one to deny one's pain, suffering, and feelings of empathy.

Thus, Hitler's psychopathology (as described in detail by Erich Fromm, 1974) is less frightening than the fact that millions of people believed they had found in him a lost part of themselves. This is a situation that of course continues to exist without Hitler. There are people today who lead unintegrated lives because they cannot differentiate between their fantasies and their real life, and therefore become the bearers of others' lost hopes and longings. They live without context, without access to their feelings, and without connection to real relationships, social processes, or the continuity of their own history. Their behavior is cut off from all of this, their point of reference a fantasy life fixated on male power. Adherents of such people believe they have rediscovered in their idol's rage and hatred parts of themselves that were lost because they were repressed.

The pathology of this phenomenon lies in the rage originating in the misery caused by children's disappointed hopes and unsatisfied need for love. Their search for love therefore becomes distorted and is replaced by hatred and violence. As Rheingold, the American psychiatrist, describes it in his study of motherhood, with increasing repression the desire for love is transformed into a masked desire for revenge. At the same time, that part of the self which was deprived of love becomes self-delusional, which prevents the true feelings of hatred from being expressed directly (Rheingold, 1964, 1957). "Self-discovery" in the form of identification with a Führer then causes the hatred to be legitimized as love. One can now commit murder out of love for the fatherland.

Hitler's lack of context becomes clear in his poses—the pose of feeling reverence for the heroism of the German soldier and especially the pose

of having empathy both for them and for the German people. In point of fact, Hitler avoided visiting the battlefront because he couldn't bear the sight of the dead and the wounded, and because the compassionate words he addressed to the soldiers were without any emotional context, without any genuine feeling of human connectedness. For him soldiers were merely "tools" for realizing his plans. When dead or wounded, they were only "discarded rifles" in his eyes (Maser, p. 255).

Assuming the pose of the tyrannical, undaunted, and unyielding Führer, Hitler was able to devote himself totally to his murderous fantasies, whereas reality was unbearable for him. After the unsuccessful attempt on his life on July 20, 1944, he had the perpetrators executed by hanging them on butcher hooks like slaughtered animals, and ordered the executions, accompanied by humiliating torture, to be filmed. He avoided direct confrontation with the carrying out of his lethal and hate-filled fantasies by watching the film later. He wasn't even able to tell his cook to her face that she was fired after it was discovered that she was part Jewish.

Werner Maser believes that in the case of the murder of Jews as well, Hitler could be so inhuman only "as long as he didn't stand face-to-face with his victims" (p. 132). His assumption is similar to my own analysis, according to which Hitler's anti-Semitism was an aspect of his assuming a role; the logic of his role then determined the extent of his playacting. Playing a role always has to do with the effects one wants to achieve, not with an actual emotional state such as hatred for an individual Jew. What is so frightening is that in reality, Hitler's hatred was not directed at specific human beings but was an abstraction originating from his hatred for the stranger within. Hatred for the stranger inside oneself has its own reality for a Führer's followers, who require it because it permits them to live out their malevolent fantasies. The pose serves the purpose of outwitting the anxiety stemming from the insuperable terrors of early childhood.

Another sign that Hitler's behavior lacked a real context was his inability to bear uncertainty. As a result, he constantly had to adopt a pose of being determined and strong willed. "It was quite characteristic of the Third Reich in the years from 1934 to 1939 that crises repeatedly arose in domestic and foreign affairs. No sooner was one over than the next began. For the most part they were consciously created by Hitler . . . as a result of his impatience. Hitler couldn't abide a slow process of ripening" (Domarus, I, 464). It is interesting to note what Lenin said in 1920 in his criticism of left-wing radicals: "They confuse wishful thinking with facts . . . They present impatience as a theoretical argument." Lenin understood the infantile nature of such impatience and realized that behind it was hidden an inability to tolerate anxiety. Basically, impatience masks a deep dependency.

Impatient people are not able to bear frustration. Hitler didn't cloak his inability to tolerate anxiety and frustration with impatience alone, but also by interpreting this inability as a sign of his strength and forceful action: "I realize increasingly that it is always better to accept an end with horror, if necessary, than to tolerate a horror without end" (speech of August 11, 1934; quoted by Domarus).

The sociologist C. Wright Mills believed that this type of person is constantly striving for recognition; for him every relationship is just a staging ground for maneuvers by which, through studied behavior, he tries to convince other people of his sincerity. "He must continually persuade others and himself as well that he is the opposite of what he actually is" (Mills, p. 348).

When someone like Hitler has to reject his own original needs and perceptions as something strange and foreign, then—as his interior world becomes a witch's cauldron seething with hatred and vengefulness—he will lose his humanity. But when such a man makes a great effort to give himself the appearance of humaneness, most people will not perceive the contradiction between the appearance and the reality. Of course, the fact that those he is trying to impress are willing to accept this contradiction and deny the facts also plays a role here. As a child, Hitler had to create a counterpole to his unbearably great neediness and helplessness; he did this by producing a world of grandiose fantasies. Split off from their origin in misery and terror, these fantasies were transformed into abstract "ideas"—for example, anti-Semitism—by means of which he promised to rescue others who also felt powerless because they too had lost contact with their feelings. Central to these ideas was the unspoken but implicit promise to deliver people from their alienation and inner victimhood by directing their hatred toward others. The result was murder and unbridled violence. Death, disguised as a holy mission, became the goal.

Thus, a pose becomes an accepted "sane" reality. Henry Miller interprets this as follows: "We are so 'sane' that if we were to pass ourselves on the road we would not recognize ourselves because the self confronting us would be so frightening" (Miller, p. 104).

Analysis of the psychopathological dialectic existing between Hitler and his followers must also take the following aspect into account: In the role of an authoritarian father, Hitler enabled them to forsake their own authoritarian fathers. A remarkable phenomenon resulted: those who slavishly obeyed authority became "rebels" by declaring their allegiance to

Hitler. Although on the surface they felt duty-bound to support the dominant social structure, in the name of submission to an authority they destroyed life and acted in contradiction to their supposed allegiance to law and order.

The question of who Hitler was can be answered only in the context of his followers, for it was they who made him into the person who occupies historians to the present day. Without the reciprocal interaction between him and his adherents, there would not have been the Hitler we know. Only by connecting with the distorted needs of people damaged in their identity and sense of worth could a man who was incapable of either leading or governing become their leader. That is the great paradox: Hitler is an embodiment of the unreal world of role-playing in which the role is confused with reality, thus creating a "reality" that exists without the actor's responsibility. Carl Amery has aptly described the contemporary significance of this situation with his observation that Hitler was a precursor of our day. He mirrored perfectly a world in which image has taken the place of reality and role-playing has been substituted for responsibility.

This article was translated by Hunter Hannum and Hildegarde Hannum, and is based on Arno Gruen Der Fremde in uns (The Stranger Within Us), *Klett-Cotta: Stuttgart, 2000. Arno Gruen is a psychoanalyst living in Zurich, Switzerland.*

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